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On the Meeting in Paris of Those Responsible for the Principal Branches of the Vincentian Family (February 22, 1998)

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February 22, 1998

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission throughout the world

My very dear brothers,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

Today I am writing to give you an account of the 4th meeting of those responsible for some of the principal branches of our Vincentian Family. This time representatives from the Miraculous Medal Association and from the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul joined us for the first time. Present at the meeting were: the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Juana Elizondo, and Sr. Therezinha Remonato, the Assistant General; the President of the International Association of Charity, Mrs. Patricia Palacios de Nava, together with Mrs. Mauricette Borloo, Vice-President, and Mrs. Marianne Chevalier, Secretary General; the President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Mr. César Augusto Nunes Viana, together with Mr. Amin A. de Tarrazi, Vice-President, Mr. Gerry Martin, Vice-President, and Mr. Erich Schmitz; for the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, Miss Edurne Urdampilleta from Spain and Miss Isabelle Saint-Gérard from France; for the Miraculous Medal Association, Fr. Charles Shelby from St. Louis in the United States; for the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, Fr. Yvon Laroche, Superior General, and Fr. Tito Marega, Vicar General. Fr. Lauro Palú, Assistant General, and I represented the Congregation of the Mission.

The objectives of this meeting were: 1) to exchange information about the activities of the various groups; 2) to investigate ways in which we can help one another in initial and ongoing formation; 3) to find further ways to work together with and for the poor. The agenda included 15 points. Here I will touch only on some of the most important ones.

1. We spent much of the first morning sharing information about the principal events of the past year and also coming to know the new participants at our meeting. Since we had recently concluded a meeting of those responsible for some of the major branches of the Miraculous Medal Association throughout the world, Fr. Shelby was able to fill us in on the life and activities of the Association. Fr. Yvon Laroche recounted the history of the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in 1845 by Jean-Léon Le Prevost who was one of the original companions of Frederick Ozanam. We spoke too of the recent General Assembly of the Daughters of Charity at which the members of AIC participated actively. We also discussed the beatification of Frederick Ozanam in Paris last August and the World Youth Day during which 2400 members of our own Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, from 48 different countries, gathered together for a week, living in tents at Villebon. We talked of our new missions in Siberia and Rwanda, as well as of the Congregation's decision to seek representation at the United Nations as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in order to make our voice known on important social issues like poverty, hunger, education, health care, and human rights.

Looking to the future, we spoke about preparation and planning for the upcoming general assemblies of various branches and exchanged invitations:

The General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission which will be held July 6-31, 1998 and whose theme is "The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium"

The AIC Assembly of Delegates which will be held in Querétaro, Mexico, November 9-15, 1998 and whose theme is "AIC 1998: Looking to the Third Millennium _ a challenge, a commitment, a hope"

The General Assembly of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul which will take place in Fatima, November 26-29, 1998 and whose theme is "The Society of St. Vincent de Paul after the year 2000 and after the beatification of Frederick Ozanam"

The first official General Assembly of the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, foreseen for the year 2000 in Rome, after the approbation of their International Statutes.

2. We discussed a draft of a document prepared by AIC on the role of their counsellors (chaplains, advisors). These are often Vincentians or Daughters of Charity but are also sometimes diocesan priests or trained lay people. This document will be further discussed at AIC's General Assembly next November. We will then, with the help of this document, be able to draft similar job descriptions for the counsellors of other Vincentian lay groups.

3. Each of us presented what we are presently doing for the initial and ongoing formation of our members. Out of this discussion arose a number of suggestions: 1) the preparation of a work focusing on significant figures in the history of the Vincentian Family, with brief monographs about their thought and their original contribution to the pastoral, missionary activity of the Church; 2) the organization of a congress on Vincentian spirituality for the year 2000; 3) the writing of a book on lay Vincentian spirituality, which would use as a starting point many of the writings that already exist but would focus on how our Vincentian heritage can be embodied in the lives of lay men and women, from the youth groups to our adult members.

4. In preparation for our meeting, we had prepared descriptions of projects in which the various branches are serving the poor together on all the continents. We examined these at length and decided to publish a description of seven such projects as examples that might stimulate other similar initiatives. These projects are located in Payatas (Philippines), Fianarontsoa (Madagascar), Mexico (the Federal District), Genoa (Italy), Cologne (Germany), Madrid (Spain), and Matola (Mozambique). They reach out to the poorest of the poor and have received financing from various agencies. We hope that other similar projects can be organized cooperatively by the branches of our family throughout the world. You will soon see more information in *Vincentiana*, *The Echoes of the Company*, the AIC bulletin, the bulletin of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, etc.

5. We treated many other matters at the meeting, including an evaluation of the annual day of prayer on September 27. All noted that there has been very lively, creative participation in such days, including not only the members of our various branches but also the poor themselves. In addition, we evaluated the implementation of the conclusions of our previous meetings and fixed January 14-16, 1999 as the date for our next meeting.

In conclusion, I simply want to say this. Over the last several years, we have developed a growing consciousness of our Vincentian *Family*. While striving to foster the distinctive charisms of each group in the family, we have also been seeking to forge closer mutual bonds by praying together, cooperating in formation programs, and collaborating in common apostolic projects. At our meeting, all of us were conscious that the third millennium challenges us to continue to create networks and to find further ways of channeling our energies in a unified way toward the service of the poor. I hope that our upcoming General Assembly will enable us to concretize further objectives whereby the members of our family can assist one another in growing as servants of the poor. In this "Year of the Holy Spirit" I join with you in praying for a deeper share in the fire of God's love.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General